

Over the past ten years, there has been a growing concern among healthcare professionals regarding sexual boundary issues and the increase in reported cases of healthcare providers interacting inappropriately with their patients.

Although it is frequently unreported, it is estimated that as many as 10% of health professionals have crossed sexual boundaries with their patients.



### What is a sexual boundary violation?

- ✿ A violation of sexual boundaries between the healthcare provider and patient involves words, behavior or actions designed or intended to arouse or gratify sexual desires.
- ✿ Sexual or romantic relationships with former patients when the healthcare provider uses or exploits, knowledge, emotions or influence derived from the previous professional relationship
- ✿ Off-color or suggestive humor
- ✿ Any words, action or behavior that could reasonably be interpreted as sexually inappropriate or unprofessional

### You should be concerned if the healthcare professional exhibits any of the following behaviors:

- Begins to disclose personal problems or discusses his or her personal life, including sexual experience, in detail.
- Offers not to charge for sessions or greatly reduces the fee, even when payment is not a hardship.
- Begins to touch in seemingly “comforting” ways, such as hugging, putting an arm around the patient during the appointment, holding the patient’s hand or caressing the patient.
- Begins to regularly extend appointments significantly beyond the normal length of a session or prolongs an office visit with personal discussion.
- Suggests a relationship beyond that of healthcare professional and patient, such as offering the patient the opportunity to participate in a business deal, offering housing or financial assistance, or engaging in any personal interaction outside the treatment facility.



### Possible long-term effects to patients victimized by a sexual boundary violation

- Emotional turmoil
- Shame, fear or rage
- Guilt and self-blame
- Isolation and emptiness, disengagement from services
- Cognitive distortion
- Identity confusion
- Emotional instability
- Sexual dysfunction
- Mistrust of authority, paranoia
- Depression
- Self-harm
- Suicide



If you believe you have become a victim of a sexual boundary violation, we advise you to get mental health counseling immediately.

## Consequences to Healthcare Professionals

- ✖ Possible fourth-degree criminal sexual conduct charges for sexual contact by a health professional.
- ✖ In Michigan, fourth degree criminal sexual conduct is a misdemeanor punishable by up to two years imprisonment and a maximum fine of \$500 or both.
- ✖ Disciplinary action by the state licensing board.
- ✖ Loss of license or restricted license.
- ✖ Formal charges against the health professional.

## If you believe you have been a victim of a sexual boundary violation you can:



- ② File a written ethical complaint with the District, State or National branch of the professional association of the healthcare provider or you can contact them by mail, telephone or email.
- ② File a complaint with the appropriate professional licensing board in Michigan.

## **To Report a Sexual Boundary Violation Involving Your Health Care Provider or to Help Someone Else Report This:**

- File an allegation with the appropriate professional licensing board in Michigan by contacting [www.michigan.gov/mdch](http://www.michigan.gov/mdch) and select “Health Systems and Health Profession Licensing” and then “Complaints”, both of which are on the left side of the page. This section of the website will provide you with all of the information needed to file an allegation with the State of Michigan.
- Contact the Health Regulatory Division/Allegation Section of the Bureau of Health Professions at (517) 373-9196 for information and personal assistance.



**Bureau of Health Professions  
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# Sexual Boundary Awareness

*For the Public*

